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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 7374
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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 2195
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 3256
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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XOX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media reported that yesterday settler leaders threatened to ban IDF civil administration inspectors from their communities as they prepared to tell PM Benjamin Netanyahu in a face-to-face meeting this week that they will ignore his 10-month moratorium on new construction in their communities. The Jerusalem Post reported that

the Yesha Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories declared that the moratorium is "illegitimate, immoral, inhuman, and anti-Zionist." The Jerusalem Post reported that an official from the Prime Minister's Office refused to respond to that statement. The purpose of the meeting, the official said, was for Netanyahu to hear the concerns, complaints and frustrations of the settlement leaders with respect to the moratorium. He is expected to explain his decision to freeze all new settlement projects that have not yet broken ground. Netanyahu, however, had agreed that settlers can complete 3,000 housing units whose construction had already begun. The official said Netanyahu would articulate the "high regard in which he holds the settlement community." The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday the conservative Legal Forum for the Land of Israel asked the High Court of Justice to stop the moratorium until the Government votes in the matter. Israel Radio quoted Likud cabinet minister Benny Begin as saying that settlement construction will resume in force after the end of the freeze.

HaQaretz reported that European Union foreign ministers are expected to officially call next week for the division of Jerusalem, to serve as the capitals of both Israel and Palestine. The newspaper cites a draft document authored by the current holder of the rotating E.U. presidency, Sweden, which implies that the E.U. would recognize a unilateral Palestinian declaration of statehood. HaQaretz reported that Jerusalem is waging a diplomatic campaign to keep the E.U. from issuing such an endorsement, but cited the belief of diplomats close to the E.U. deliberations that it is virtually inevitable. The Jerusalem Post quoted U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as saying, in a message to mark yesterday's annual International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People that Palestinian statehood is a "vital" component necessary for regional peace. Palestinian officials were expected to use the platform to ask the Security Council to declare a Palestinian state along 1967 borders, with east Jerusalem as the state's capital, according to reports published in recent weeks. The Jerusalem Post quoted Israel officials as saying that Israel's Ambassador to the U.N., Gabriella Shalev, who is slated to address the assembly on Tuesday, is expected to reject the concept of a one-sided establishment of a Palestinian state, emphasizing that the only way to achieve peace is through negotiations. Israel Radio reported the Israeli Foreign Ministry's warning that the possible E.U. declaration could hamper the E.U.'s ability to mediate in the current peace process.

Maariv continued to cite Arab media that progress on a deal to release Gilad Shalit is close. Leading media cite December 17 or 24 as possible dates for the swap. Yediot quoted Al Arabiya-TV as saying that there is a difference of opinions between Israel and Hamas regarding the release of 50 prisoners from the movement's military branch, as Israel refuses to free them. Israel Radio quoted the London-based Al Hayat as saying that Israel has agreed to release 17 prisoners from East Jerusalem. Major media quoted Supreme Court President Dorit Beinisch as saying on Sunday that it is too early to reveal information about the prisoner exchange.

The Jerusalem Post cited figures released yesterday by the GOI's central Bureau of Statistics that the number of housing starts in the West Bank in the West Bank dropped by 27.6% in the first nine months of 2009, compared to the same time period in 2008. In contrast, however, the number of completed homes rose by 30% in the first nine months of 2009, compared to the same time period in 2008.

HaQaretz reported that the Task Force to Save the Nation and the Land, the organization that offered every soldier refusing to evacuate a settlement, and the Kfir Brigade soldiers who publicly demonstrated their opposition to evacuation, 1,000 shekels (a little more than \$250) for every day they spend in military prison, is a registered non-profit organization and has a license to operate. The group receives donations from a U.S. based group that is tax exempt. No comment was available from the organization. The group, established in 2003 and rising to fame during the disengagement from Gaza, melds positions of the extreme right wing and the messianic Hassidic Chabad sect. The group is headed by Rabbi Shalom Dov Wolpe, a Chabad Hassid of the messianic stream, who lives in Kiryat Gat. In recent years the group began offering monetary rewards to soldiers and civilians. In response to a question by HaQaretz, regarding the role of the registrar of NGOs not taking any action to disband the group for operating illegally, a Justice Ministry spokesman said

that "a review of the file [of the organization] does not reveal any documents that support this argument. We will be able to examine this claim if information available to the person making the claim [against the group] is given to us. Moreover, so long as there is suspicion of illegal conduct, the authorized body to examine the matter is the police." Like many of the extreme right-wing organizations receiving money from U.S. supporters, the funding for the group enjoys tax-free status. Peace groups and Palestinians have complained to U.S. authorities, but there has been no change in the status of the organization's supporting the right wing. The bureau of DM Ehud Barak told HaQaretz that it had instructed the legal authorities to initiate an immediate investigation into the role of various elements that encourage soldiers to carry out protest actions against orders.

The Jerusalem Post writes that the planned construction of the West Bank city of Rawabi combines Palestinian entrepreneurialism and Israeli experience.

HaQaretz quoted IDF Spokesman Brig. Gen. Avi Benayahu as saying yesterday that his office is to begin drafting computer experts with an eye toward establishing an Internet and new media department unit. Responding to criticism of Israel's ability to face hostile entities on the Web, Benayahu said that the new program would be able to deal with the problem.

The Jerusalem Post reported that, in the face of the growing missile threat against Israel, the IDF Operations Directorate has established a new department responsible for coordinating efforts to protect IDF bases.

NATO's Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Claudio Bisogniero, who visited Israel last week, was quoted as saying in an interview with HaQaretz that his organization will not play a role in the peace process and that Israel has a key role to play in preventing terrorism throughout the Mediterranean.

HaQaretz reported on sharp criticism by senior Foreign Ministry officials of the appointment by FM Avigdor Lieberman of Qparty hack Dorit Golender as Ambassador to Russia since she has no diplomatic experience.

All media reported that the trial of Ivan Demjanjuk, who is accused of involvement in the murder of 27,900 Jews in the death camp of Sobibor, opened in Munich yesterday.

Yediot reported that the immunization of all Israelis against swine flu will start in two weeks. Maariv and other media reported that 12 patients have died over the past five days. The number of deaths linked to the virus has risen to 63.

Mideast:

1I. QTerrible Blather

Senior columnist and longtime peace advocate Yoel Marcus wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (12/1): Q[In his op-ed on the Middle East last month, New York Times pundit Thomas] Friedman was witty, as usual, but a president plummeting in the polls is not going to go into an election year at risk of losing his Democratic majority in Congress. Indeed, Thursday's New York Times editorial disagreed with Friedman, a warm-hearted Jew who wants to give us a good shake until we say we're ready. The New York Times, in contrast, says the administration lacks initiative and determination, and points to the failure of the President and his advisers to revive negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

QPeacemaking takes strategic skill. But we see no sign that President Obama and Mr. Mitchell were thinking more than one move down the board, the paper said. There is no choice but to keep trying, lest the extremists lead to another war. And so a freeze is unacceptable. Netanyahu has not really changed. As usual, he will do what needs to be done only when he is forced to. That is actually what The New York Times is demanding. The maturity of Netanyahu's leadership will be tested in his ability to implement the construction moratorium in the territories, no matter how Qterrible the price is. Nothing can be worse than renewed terror or war.

II. QU.S. and Israel: Lessons of 2009

David Makovsky, senior fellow and director of the Project on the Middle East Peace Process at the Washington Institute, the co-author with Dennis Ross of the new book QMyths, Illusions and Peace,Q wrote in Ha'aretz (12/1): QThe announcement of a moratorium on building in the settlements ends the first chapter of U.S.-Israel relations during the Obama era. There are lessons for all.... One lesson is that even if the Israeli opposition cannot say QyesQ to Barack Obama, the United States has lost mainstream Israelis. A second lesson is that caution is required in raising expectations. Abbas cannot be less Palestinian than the U.S.... There are also lessons for Israel. Trust at the top is indispensable. Obama and Netanyahu will both be around for some time. Israelis have bemoaned the lack of trust between the two. Israel believes it was ambushed on the issue of a settlement freeze. On the one hand, Israel is correct in claiming that the Obama administration erred by denying the verbal understanding between the U.S. and Israel in 2003 on defining the geographic expansion of settlements. This undermines the prospect of future verbal understandings with the U.S. On the other hand, trust goes both ways. Israel does not emphasize the fact that it never implemented the West Bank understanding of 2003 that it now declares to be key.... Indeed, there are lessons for Arabs, too. Despite Obama's speech in Cairo, which raised expectations, the long-standing Arab dream of the U.S. bending Israel to its will did not materialize.... The Arab states need to contribute their share to ensure that Netanyahu's gesture is not lost. They need to provide Abbas with political cover and declare their unambiguous support for peace negotiations now between Israel and the Palestinians.

III. QHouse of Cards

Former Ambassador to the U.S., former Minister of Foreign Affairs, and former Minister of Defense Moshe Arens wrote in Ha'aretz (12/1): QAt this time the Palestinian state may be no more than an impossible dream. The reality is that there are currently three Palestinian entities -- the Kingdom of Jordan, the Hamas-ruled enclave in Gaza, and the area of Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank] that is not in the control of Abbas, although his headquarters is there. No law of nature prohibits the existence of three Palestinian states at some future date, but it seems patently unreasonable and not very likely. Freezing settlement construction in Judea and Samaria for the next 10 months is not going to change that. So why did Benjamin Netanyahu's government decide on the 10-month settlement freeze, which is no more than a futile gesture? The prevailing explanation is that the Israeli government wanted to please President Obama. Although personal relations between the leaders of nations are not completely unimportant in international relations, it is certainly not the first priority in conducting a country's foreign policy. Relations between Israel and the United States are not based on personal sympathy, but rather on common values and strategic interests. When there are differences of opinion between two friendly nations they are not resolved by trying to please one or the other leader. They are certainly not resolved through the issuance of orders by one side to the other. Israel is a small country, but it is an independent country. Netanyahu does not have to state, as Menachem Begin did, that we are not a banana republic, but he does need to make that clear. That is of great importance for U.S.-Israel relations in the years to come.

IV. QCooperation with the U.S.

Zalman Shoval, a senior Likud member and former ambassador to the U.S., wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (12/1): QAs was apparently agreed in advance, U.S. and Israeli spokespeople stressed that the Israeli decision on a construction moratorium in Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank] was a unilateral step, and this was in order to spare Washington the need to relate to the question of whether or not this was done with the United StatesQ consent. There may have been earlier understandings, but the importance of the official statements in praise of the [Israeli] Government's decision -- statements made in Washington -- is that they give the seal of approval. Israel proposed a construction delay of half a year, the Americans demanded a year, and the compromise was ten months.... The avowed aspiration of the U.S. administration is to reach a permanent status arrangement within a set period of time. In the meantime, it

seems it will focus on an attempt to launch talks at relatively low levels between the sides, with its Qfacilitation.Q It's hard to believe that this goal, i.e. reaching a permanent status arrangement, will be reached in the foreseeable future. After all, there is no practical possibility of bridging between Israel's positions and those of the Arabs on the core issues, i.e. refugees, Jerusalem, and settlements. The proof of that is that the Palestinians flatly rejected even the most far-reaching proposals of the Olmert government on the matter. In fact, the famous moderation of the QmoderatesQ among the Palestinians is only to a degree, and does not even include recognition of the right of the Jewish people to a state of their own. That said, Israel does not want and should not stand in America's way when it claims that perhaps it is possible to reach positive results.... Our target audience at the moment is not Ramallah but, rather, Washington. We should also remember that the U.S., under Obama, and Israel under Netanyahu, have unprecedented cooperation on security matters. With the clock hands of the Iranian nuclear threat ticking quickly ahead, anyone who criticizes the Prime Minister's latest decision and anyone who has harsh criticism, sometimes overly harsh, of the U.S.

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administration, should also take this fact into account.

IV. QThe Gilad Shalit Deal

Former Meretz leader, former Justice Minister, and chief Israeli promoter of the Geneva Initiative, Yossi Beilin, wrote in Israel Hayom (12/1): QGilad Shalit will not be the last abducted Israeli -- not only because his very release will increase the appetite to kidnap others. As long as there is no peace between us and the Palestinians, there will be violent occurrences in this area, including abductions.... It would be better to make every possible effort to resolve the conflict and understand that until then we will need to waver in dilemmas of the Shalit affair type.

VI. QIn defense of Barack Obama

Lenny Ben-David, who served as a senior diplomat in the Israeli Embassy in Washington and a member of AIPAC's staff in Washington and Jerusalem from 1992 to 1997, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (12/1): QThe Obama administration certainly has committed its share of questionable activities, such as ignoring George W. Bush's assurances on Israeli population centers in the West Bank, being over-confident in the ability of Palestinian security forces, attempting to appoint Chas Freeman to a high intelligence post, and abysmally executing its campaign against Israeli settlements and building in Jerusalem. Perhaps the biggest mistake of all, however, was the advice given by Obama advisors that the rules of tikkun olam [a Hebrew phrase meaning: mending the world] have a place in the compassionless Middle East. The diplomatic failures led the New York Times editorial board to conclude on November 28, QWe don't know exactly what happened but we are told that Mr. Obama relied more on the judgment of his political advisers -- specifically his chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel -- than of his Mideast specialists.Q Misguided, perhaps. But to declare the Obama administration to be anti-Semitic is just wrong. Let's keep the debate in the area of policy. Unfortunately, there'll be no shortage of topics to discuss.

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